

The Civilian Conservation Corps in Utah

Introduction

In 1929, the United States had a stock market crash that started the **Great Depression**. Many businesses closed, and millions of people lost their jobs. Farmers could not sell their crops, so they could not pay their loans and often lost their farms. Banks also failed when people could not repay loans. When banks closed, people lost their savings.

This created a cycle: unemployment meant people spent less money, which caused businesses to lose money and lay off more workers. In Utah, unemployment reached **36% in 1933**.

When **Franklin D. Roosevelt** became president in 1933, he created a plan called the **New Deal** to help the country recover. The New Deal created many government programs with three main goals:

- **Relief** for poor and unemployed people
- **Recovery** to help the economy improve
- **Reform** to prevent future economic disasters

Programs like Social Security and the FDIC were created during this time.

The Civilian Conservation Corps

One important New Deal program was the **Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC)**. It gave jobs to young men between **18 and 25 years old**, who often had trouble finding work.

The men lived in camps away from home and worked on conservation projects. Because they planted trees and worked outdoors, people sometimes called them the **“Tree Army.”**

The camps were organized like military camps. The men slept in tents or barracks, ate together in mess halls, and worked during the day.

Each worker earned **\$30 per month**. Most of the money (**\$25**) was sent to their families, and they kept **\$5** for personal use. This helped struggling families and supported local economies.

The CCC in Utah

Thousands of young men worked in **more than 100 CCC camps in Utah**. Older workers called **Local Experienced Men (LEMs)** helped train and supervise them.

The CCC workers completed many important projects. They:

- Built **roads and hiking trails**
- Created **campgrounds and picnic areas**
- Reduced **erosion** on mountains
- Built **river diversions**
- Constructed **visitor centers and monuments**

Their work can still be seen today in places like **Cedar Breaks National Monument, Zion National Park, and Bryce Canyon National Park.**



Visitor Center built by CCC men in Cedar Breaks National Monument. Photographed in 2025 by Jeff Nokes



Part of the Bristlecone Trail in Bryce Canyon, built by CCC men. Photographed in 2025 by Jeff Nokes

Life in the CCC

Serving in the CCC gave young men new opportunities. Instead of staying home without work, they could travel, learn skills, and earn money for their families.

Life in the camps included many different jobs. Some men built structures, while others cooked, drove trucks, kept records, or repaired equipment.

The men worked during the week but had free time in the evenings and on weekends. They often played sports, wrote camp newspapers, or visited nearby towns for social events like dances.



Sheep corral built by CCC men near Zion National Park. Photographed in 2025 by Jeff Nokes

The End of the CCC

The CCC ended when **World War II** began. The military needed soldiers, and factories reopened to produce supplies for the war.

Although the camps closed, the work of the CCC remains important. Many of the **trails, buildings, and parks they built are still used today.**



Canyon Overlook Trail in Zion National Park, built by CCC workers. Photographed in 2025 by Jeff Nokes